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*SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE*

Number 10-2-66

REACTIONS TO A POSSIBLE US COURSE OF ACTION

Submitted by

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

17 March 1966

DATE

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*Submitted by the*  
**DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, AEC and the NSA.*

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**UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD**

*on 17 March 1966 Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; the Assistant General Manager for Administration, Atomic Energy Commission; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

17 March 1966

SUBJECT: SNIE 10-2-66: REACTIONS TO A POSSIBLE US COURSE OF ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To assess the principal reactions in Communist and non-Communist countries to reconnaissance over China and North Vietnam by OXCART vehicles based in Okinawa.

DISCUSSION

1. China. We believe that the Chinese would quickly acquire knowledge of the operation. Mission aircraft would almost certainly be detected by Chinese radar and, by virtue of speed and altitude, be identified as the new and advanced type of aircraft announced by the President in 1964. The chances are good that Chinese agents on Okinawa would become aware of the operation and that Peiping would quickly relate the new overflights to the base at Kadena.

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2. The Chinese would of course try to destroy the aircraft. Assuming their failure to do so, and given their practice of not acknowledging successful U-2 overflights, they would probably not draw any special attention to this operation. Furthermore, in this contingency the kind of pressure they might try to apply to Japan or to any other country which might have afforded assistance would be of the most general sort -- if any at all.

3. The situation would be quite different if an OXCART aircraft came down on Chinese territory. Such an incident would be the occasion for a major political and propaganda campaign, particularly if a live American pilot fell into Chinese hands. In dramatizing the affair, Peiping would hope to persuade the world, including the American public, of Chinese strength and of the reckless aggressiveness of US policy. They would also use what resources they had to mobilize public opinion in Japan and in Okinawa against US control of the latter island and against the existence of US bases in Japan itself.

4. It remains to consider how the Chinese Communists would interpret US intentions in the light of this overflight. The Chinese reactions would be related to the presence of large US ground forces in South

- 2 -

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Vietnam, US bombing of North Vietnam, and apprehensions regarding the possibility of a US attack on China itself. The Chinese, in their propaganda, have been stressing the danger of such an attack. Although they may indeed fear a series of actions and reactions in Vietnam and elsewhere which would lead in time to a Sino-US war, they probably do not expect it to occur at an early date. Their apprehensions regarding the likelihood of a US attack on China may grow or diminish depending upon developments between now and the time the overflights begin.

5. Upon detecting OXCART intrusions, there is some chance that Peiping would conclude that the US, in unveiling an advanced system at this time, was seeking target intelligence which it meant to use at an early date. This chance would be greater if the program began intensively, with a large number of overflights in a short period, or if it began concurrently with a major expansion of US air attacks upon North Vietnam.\* On the other hand, the Chinese have become accustomed to frequent probes of their air space by different vehicles, and they are aware that improvements in their own defenses have increased the vulnerability of older US

\* Mr. Thomas L. Hughes, the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, and Dr. Louis W. Tordella, for the Director, National Security Agency, believe the following sentence should be inserted at this point: "In any case the US employment of such a sophisticated reconnaissance vehicle would tend to increase Chinese fears that the US was expecting an eventual escalation of the Vietnam conflict into open conflict with China."

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systems. We conclude that, barring the special circumstances mentioned above, the Chinese would soon come to regard this vehicle, despite its advanced character, as another stage in a continuing US collection program, with no special significance for broader US intentions. Thus we think that these missions would not lead them to take any drastic new military action.

6. North Vietnam. The DRV is already subjected to heavy US air attack and reconnaissance. It would attach little extra significance to the OXCART operation.

7. The USSR. Through a variety of its own sources -- agents, satellite photography, intercepted communications, and possibly radar returns -- the Soviets would quickly acquire a fairly complete picture of the operation. They would probably reinforce any Chinese or North Vietnamese propaganda campaigns built around the downing of an aircraft. Their primary concern in this regard would be to forestall use of the aircraft over their own territory. They might make private communications to the US stressing the seriousness with which they would view any intrusion into Soviet airspace, but they would almost certainly not make US overflights of China the occasion of a major crisis in US-Soviet relations.

- 4 -

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8. Japan. The mere deployment of the aircraft could create difficulties. Its presence on Okinawa would soon become known and might be vigorously publicized by Japanese or American newspapers. Japanese leftists, with or without inspiration from the Chinese Communists, would try to make an issue of it, probably portraying the aircraft as a highly-advanced, nuclear-capable weapon. They would probably try to raise fears that this US activity would lead to Japanese involvement in the Vietnam war or in actions directly against Communist China. We believe that Sato, assuming that the development did not come as a complete surprise to him, could probably deal with the situation, and that he would not raise objections to a continuance of OXCART operations. If an aircraft came down in China, however, and the Chinese Communists extensively publicized the event, the difficulties of the Japanese government would be greater. We still believe that Sato could probably weather the storm, though he might have to ask the US to discontinue the program from the Okinawa base.

9. Other Non-Communist Reactions. In other non-Communist countries some elements would try to make an issue out of the deployment of the aircraft to the Far East. There would be some fairly vociferous criticism, but most governments would ignore or play down the matter. The situation would be considerably more agitated if an aircraft came down in China,

- 5 -

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and numerous people, especially perhaps in the US itself, would urge the President to discontinue the operation lest it increase the risk of Chinese Communist overt intervention in the Vietnam war. Even so, there would in our opinion be nothing approaching the outcry over the U-2 affair in 1960, which was used to disrupt a summit conference. There is no developing detente between the US and Communist China to be disturbed by the event, and we have estimated above that the USSR would almost certainly not create a major crisis over the matter. Few foreign governments, whether or not they actually approved the US reconnaissance effort, would be unhappy that it was going on. In such circumstances adverse reactions and pressures on the US are unlikely to be very powerful.

- 6 -

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